
Report of Paul Darby, Corporate Director of Resources (Interim)

Councillor Amanda Hoggood, Leader of the Council

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide.

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To present progress towards achieving the key outcomes of the council's corporate performance framework.

The impact of COVID-19

- 2 2020/21 was dominated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Across the world more than 115 million people have been infected and more than 2.5 million have died.
- 3 Following confirmation of its first cases in January 2020, the UK government put in place restrictions which would contain the virus, minimise deaths and prevent health and social care systems being overwhelmed. Those restrictions, in varying forms, have impacted our everyday lives, our health and the economy ever since.
- 4 At the beginning of quarter four, in response to a huge increase in COVID-19 cases and the discovery of a faster spreading variant, restrictions were tightened with a third national lockdown. At the same time, the national vaccination programme¹ continued to be rolled out.
- 5 The subsequent fall in infection rates allowed the government to implement plans for a [gradual and phased route out of lockdown](#). The first step, centred around children and students returning to face-to-face teaching, took place in March.

¹ started on 8 December 2020

- 6 In line with these developments, alongside our continuing public health role and work with other agencies on the local resilience forum (covering both County Durham and Darlington) to protect our communities and support those affected by the pandemic, we are also developing plans for future recovery.
- 7 The COVID-19 surveillance dashboard can be accessed [here](#).

Performance Reporting

- 8 This report is structured around the three externally focused results-based ambitions of the [County Durham Vision 2035](#) which is shared by all partners on the County Durham Partnership alongside a fourth 'excellent council' theme contained within our [Council Plan](#)². It also includes an overview of the impact of COVID-19 on council services, our staff, and residents.

More and Better Jobs

- 9 The impact of COVID-19 continues to be felt in the UK economy – with GDP contracting by 9.8% in 2020, the largest annual fall on record³. Latest figures suggest a broadly stable jobs market with early signs of recovery. However, there are 772,000 fewer payrolled employees than pre-COVID, with the hospitality sector, those aged under 25, and those living in London⁴ impacted the most.
- 10 Across County Durham our employment rate remains static, but as the government is continuing to support one in eight eligible jobs through the furlough scheme and six in ten self-employed people through the self-employment income support scheme, we are expecting it to deteriorate in the future. That said, the increase in universal credit has levelled off which suggests local and national support measures are helping to create economic resilience.
- 11 We remain concerned about the longer-term impacts of the pandemic. The economic situation is contributing to financial pressures across the county, with increased levels of children eligible for free school meals and many households at risk of falling into poverty. And although educational attainment is broadly in line with performance across the country, the longer-term impact of COVID-19 will affect the futures of our young people.
- 12 To mitigate against these economic challenges, we are continuing to provide financial support to residents and businesses, are moving

² approved by Council in October 2020

³ Office of National Statistics: [GDP quarterly national accounts, UK: October to December 2020](#)

⁴ Office of National Statistics: [Labour Market Overview, UK: May 2021](#)

forward with significant investment projects which will create new infrastructure and transform our towns and villages, and are helping people back into work particularly through self-employment or by moving into job sectors experiencing increasing demand, e.g. food retail, delivery.

Long and Independent Lives

- 13 Latest data (pre-COVID) shows that across the county people are living longer. Better working conditions, reduced smoking rates and improved healthcare have all contributed to increasing life expectancy from generation to generation – our residents are now living on average three years longer than 20 years ago with the gap between men and women narrowing.
- 14 However, although healthy life expectancy (years lived in good health) for men across the county has increased over the last ten years, albeit at a slower rate than overall life expectancy, the opposite is true for women. The steady decline of healthy life expectancy for women across the county means that although women are living longer than men, they live fewer years in good health. In addition, with the exception of male healthy life expectancy, the gap in life expectancies between County Durham and England is widening.
- 15 We are continuing to support people to live longer healthy lives. Focused activity across mental and physical well-being, physical activity for children, smoking quitters (particularly pregnant women and new mothers) and breastfeeding is continuing to make a difference to the lives of our residents. More smoking quitters and a greater percentage breastfeeding compared to the same period last year.
- 16 Throughout 2020/21, we continued to successfully improve outcomes for vulnerable children and their families with services which are joined up and responsive to their needs, and we remain on track to achieve 'significant and sustained outcomes' for around 6,000 families as part of our stronger families programme.
- 17 Poverty pressures remain a major issue and we expect the situation to deteriorate over the coming months. Increases in basic living costs and additional expenditure incurred due to school closures (meals, heating and equipping children for online learning) has hit those with little disposable income hard - especially as their normal coping strategies are no longer available to them, e.g. eating at friends and families, accessing the internet at their local library, buying clothes at charity shops. We are concerned about large numbers of pupils who are eligible for free school meals but are not claiming them.

- 18 The detrimental impact on mental well-being of these financial stresses, as well as increasing isolation and loneliness, is causing great concern and has led more people (across all age groups) to seek support through primary and secondary mental health services. Although this is impacting people across all age groups, recent data suggests that it is under 18s who are suffering most.
- 19 However, a positive picture has emerged from our health services, with 89% of residents and 74% of staff across our care homes, having received their second COVID-19 vaccine.

Connected Communities – Safer focus

- 20 Although crime has fallen across all crime categories, the reduction is more noticeable in theft-related offences, which fell by a third, and reflects people spending more time at home, there being fewer opportunities for theft in public spaces and the closure of non-essential retail and the night-time economy.
- 21 However, we remain concerned about domestic abuse, which is associated with one in every five crimes, specifically the increase in those categorised as 'violence against the person' crimes. And as victims are unable to access their normal coping mechanisms, such as leaving the home or staying with others, it is likely the intensity of the situation is driving the additional demand for our specialist support services. In addition, clients are presenting with more complex issues, especially mental health, so cases are taking longer to resolve.
- 22 Conversely, anti-social behaviour (ASB) has increased. Environmental ASB has increased due to a spike in reported fly-tips between April and June (which coincided with the closure of the Household Waste Recycling Centres), residents spending more time at home (thereby witnessing and reporting events, as well as driving increases in areas such as noise) and the enforcement of COVID-19 restrictions.
- 23 We continue to perform well in relation to the timeliness of processing statutory referrals to children's social care (first contact) and single assessments and are carrying out audits to ensure quality of assessments remains consistently high.
- 24 However, we are continuing to experience budget and placement pressures as demand for children's social care remains high, with a comparatively high number of children on a child protection plan and the highest recorded number of children looked after (CLA). Although safeguarding referrals remain lower than expected, which reflects the national picture, those relating to children in danger of significant harm remain static.

Connected Communities – Sustainable Communities focus

- 25 Latest data shows that we have reduced carbon emissions by 51% compared to the 2008 baseline, and we are now implementing a range of projects to further reduce to 70% by March 2025. However, it is worth noting that this data relates to a period influenced by COVID-19 restrictions (2019/20), specifically business closures, reduced road traffic levels and more people staying at home, all of which had a positive effect on carbon emissions but are unlikely to be sustained as lockdown eases.
- 26 Another consequence of COVID-19 has been the generation of additional tonnages of household waste due to people spending more time in their homes. However, although we collected more household waste, the proportion recycled reduced – mainly due to closure of the recycling markets early in the pandemic (which have now re-opened) and contamination of kerbside recycling bins remaining high.
- 27 Across this section, we are concerned about the lifting of the eviction ban as lockdown eases. More households are already living in temporary accommodation, and for longer, due to a shortage of suitable properties, a consequence of action taken to house rough sleepers during the pandemic. We are sourcing additional properties to help alleviate the problem.

An Excellent Council

- 28 Since the start of the pandemic, we have continually adapted our service provision and ways of working to help slow the spread of COVID-19, prevent our health and social care systems being overwhelmed, and protect our residents and staff.
- 29 Within a very tight timeframe, we fundamentally changed our ways of working, made plans to maintain essential services without compromising the safety of our workforce or residents, and set up new delivery models to meet the additional needs of residents shielding or self-isolating.
- 30 To safeguard our employees, all staff continue to work from home where possible, and we continue to manage and control transmission risks for those essential employees who need to attend the workplace.
- 31 Although service provision and ways of working continue to be impacted and some non-essential services remain closed or are being delivered remotely, most services have now reopened under the government's roadmap to recovery. We are continuing to expand our online alternatives to face-to-face contact which are encouraging more customers to liaise with us digitally.

- 32 Our community support hub remains in place to help our most vulnerable residents through the pandemic and we continue to provide financial assistance to both residents and businesses – proactively encouraging those struggling financially to engage with us to access potential support mechanisms.
- 33 We continue to face significant financial pressure from the pandemic. The additional costs incurred and loss of income for 2020/21 are forecast to be £101 million, which we expect to be broadly covered by government funding. Additional costs and loss of income continue to be incurred in 2021/22, and this position is being closely monitored and compared with the funding provided by government. Any 2020/21 collection fund loss from reductions in council tax income can be spread over three years (2021/22 to 2023/24) with the government providing a partial grant to cover this loss. We, alongside all local government representative bodies, will continue to lobby government for additional financial support during 2021/22 if this is required.

Risk Management

- 34 Effective risk management is a vital component of the council's agenda. The council's risk management process sits alongside our change programme and is incorporated into all significant change and improvement projects. The latest report can be found [here](#).

Recommendation

- 35 That Cabinet considers the overall position and direction of travel in relation to quarter four performance, the impact of COVID-19 on performance, and the actions being taken to address areas of underperformance including the significant economic and well-being challenges because of the pandemic.

Author

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

Not applicable.

Finance

Latest performance information is being used to inform corporate, service and financial planning.

Consultation

Not applicable.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

Equality measures are monitored as part of the performance monitoring process.

Climate Change

We have declared a climate change emergency and consider the implications of climate change in our reports and decision-making.

Human Rights

Not applicable.

Crime and Disorder

A number of performance indicators and key actions relating to crime and disorder are continually monitored in partnership with Durham Constabulary.

Staffing

Performance against a number of relevant corporate health indicators has been included to monitor staffing issues.

Accommodation

Not applicable.

Risk

Reporting of significant risks and their interaction with performance is integrated into the quarterly performance management report.

Procurement

Not applicable.



Durham County Council State of the County Report

2020/21



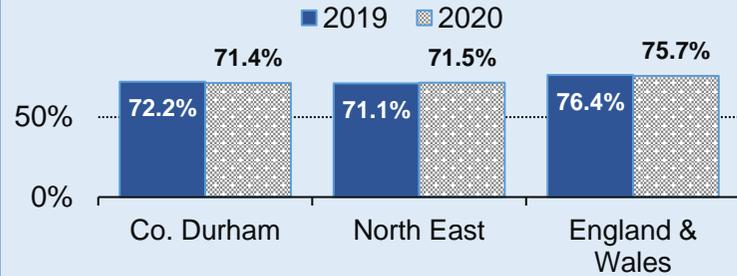
Vision for County Durham 2035 and Council Plan

- 1 The Vision for County Durham 2035 was developed following extensive consultation with residents – more than 30,000 individual feedback responses were received and analysed which significantly shaped the final vision. It is a partnership vision which was signed off by each partner organisation before being agreed by the County Durham Partnership in October 2019. It is written around three ambitions for the county and its residents being:
 - (a) More and better jobs
 - (b) Long and independent lives
 - (c) Are communities well connected and supportive of each other
- 2 The Council's corporate plan, the Council Plan, for 2021-2023 adopts the ambitions and objectives set out in the vision and supplements them with a fourth ambition - to be an excellent council.
- 3 This report summarises the status for County Durham against these four ambitions and their objectives using a set of key macro measures which present to members a summary of some of the challenges facing the county.
- 4 Further detail on these indicators can be found on our intelligence, research and knowledge base Durham Insight (<https://www.durhaminsight.info>) which is a web-based platform which provides easy to access information on County Durham. This is used extensively by the council and its partners to inform policy development and decision making.

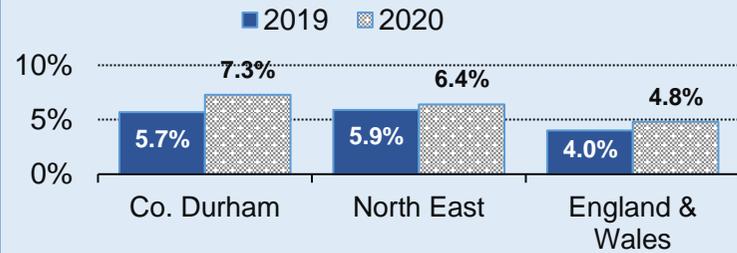
MORE AND BETTER JOBS: Do residents have good job prospects?

Summary⁵

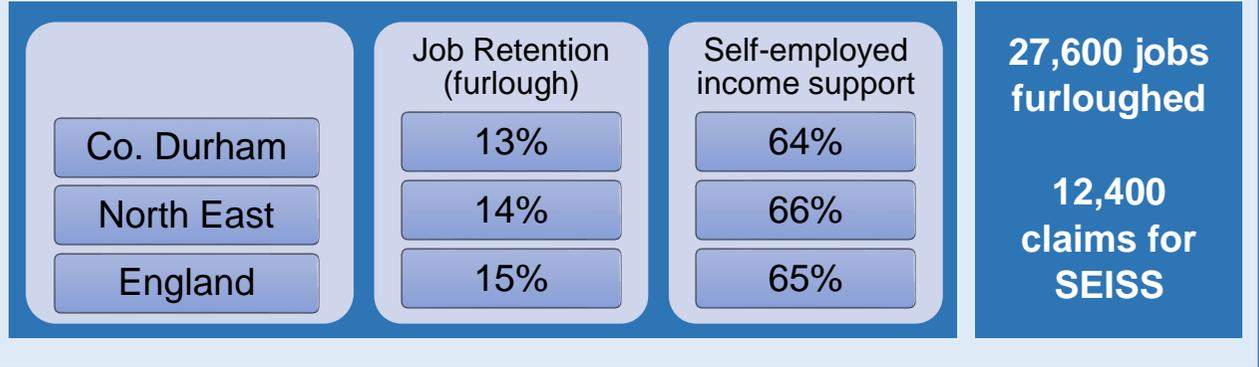
Employment Rate¹ (Jan to Dec)



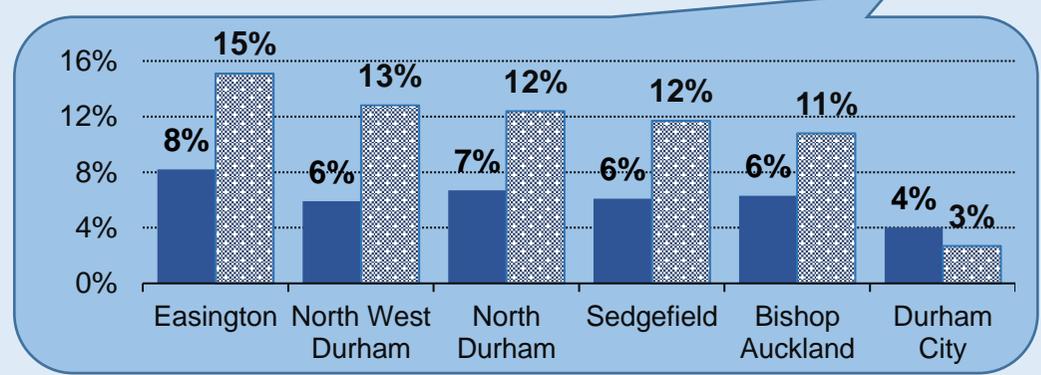
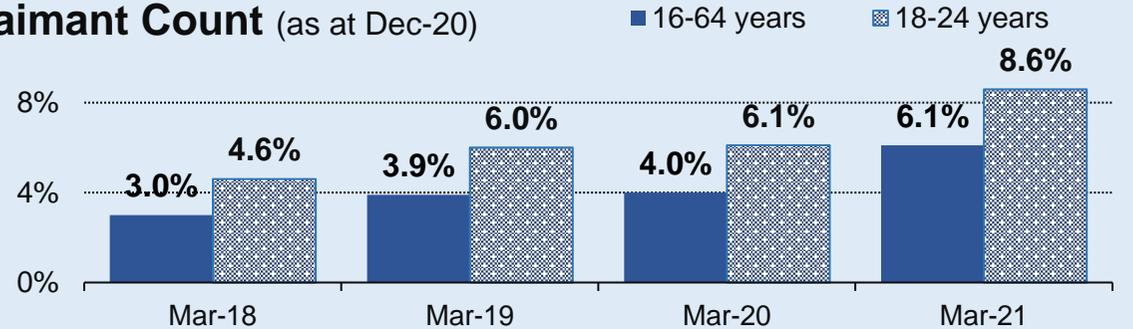
Unemployment Rate¹ (Jan to Dec)



Support Schemes (as at 31 Mar)



Claimant Count (as at Dec-20)



⁵ Employment / Unemployment Rates: Annual Population Survey Jan-20 to Dec-20

More and Better Jobs

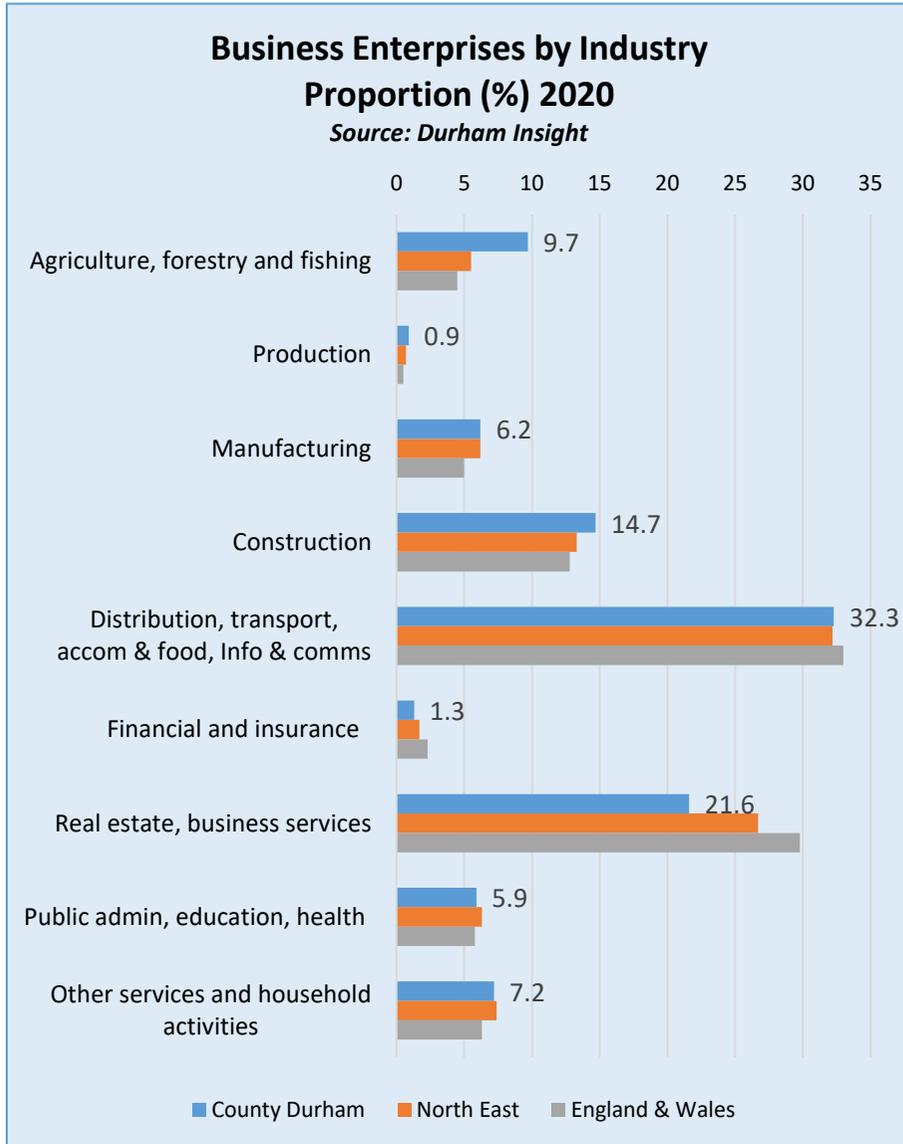
- 5 The ambition of More and Better Jobs is linked to the following key questions:
- (a) Do residents have good job prospects?
 - (b) Is County Durham a good place to do business?
 - (c) How well do tourism and cultural events contribute to our local economy?
 - (d) Do our young people have access to good quality education and training?

Do residents have good job prospects?

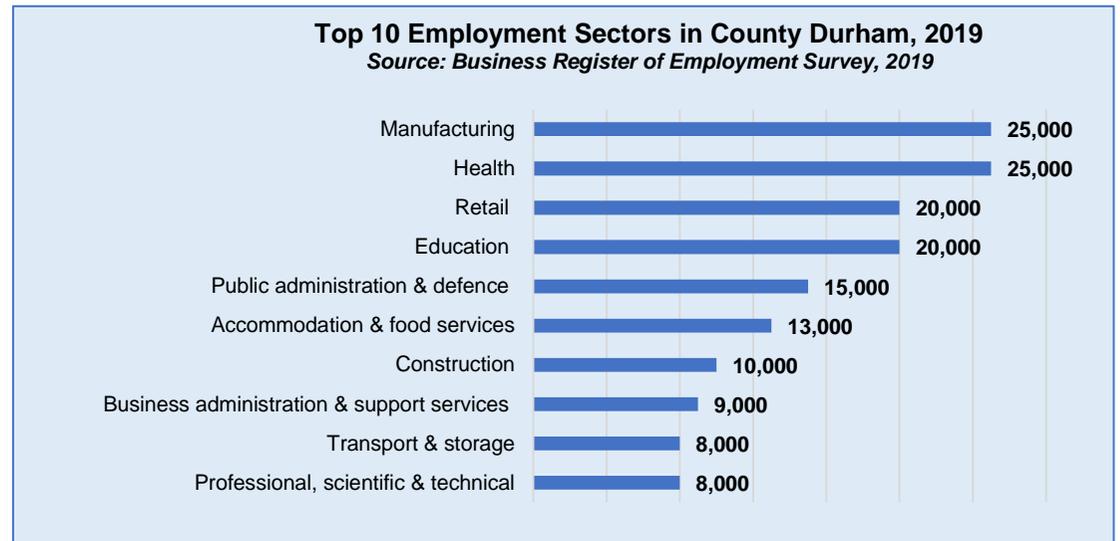
- 6 Although our employment rate has dropped slightly, it has yet to see any significant impact of the pandemic. However, we expect this to change once the government removes the available support packages (furlough and self-employment income schemes).
- 7 The unemployment rate has been increasing since June 2020, and at a greater rate than nationally. However, the rate is an estimate from a sample survey, and as it is within the estimated confidence intervals, it is possible that the latest increase is due to random sample variation.
- 8 Following a significant rise in people claiming employment benefits between March 2020 and May 2020, the claimant count has continued to remain relatively static throughout 2020/21 and now stands at 6.1%. This trend is reflected both regionally and nationally.

MORE AND BETTER JOBS:

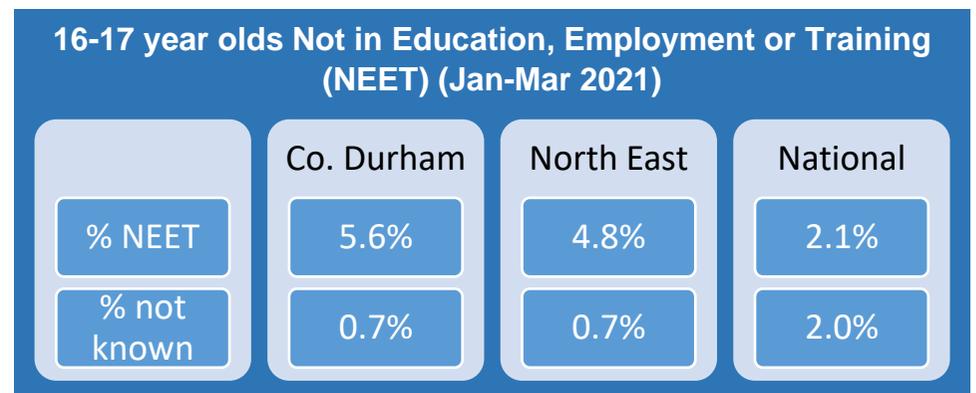
Is County Durham a good place to do business? Summary⁶



How well do tourism & cultural events contribute to our local economy? Summary⁷



Do our young people have access to good quality education and training?



additional information on businesses is available via [Durham Insight](#)

Is County Durham a good place to do business?

- 9 County Durham has rebuilt its economy since the decline of its historical key industries of coal mining and steelmaking. The industrial economy is a strength for the county and provides a significant source of employment alongside a strong public sector.
- 10 In 2020, there were 14,105 business enterprises in County Durham. This represents 266 businesses per 10,000 population which is significantly lower than the England and Wales average of 420 per 10,000 population. Since the recession of 2010, the number of businesses within the county has increased by 2,660 or 23.2%. However, this increase is lower than that seen regionally (27.9%) and nationally (32.3%.)
- 11 In terms of employment numbers, manufacturing and health are the county's most prominent employment sectors accounting for 13.7% of employment with 25,000 each.
- 12 The largest growth areas of growth in employment between 2009 and 2019 has been the arts, entertainment and recreation industries (50% or 1,500 jobs) and education (+14% or 2,500 jobs.) The largest declines in the same period have been in finance and insurance (-26%) and public administration and defence (-24%).
- 13 The pandemic impacted our ability to deliver employability programmes during 2020/21. Although, we moved programmes online when face-to-face contact ceased, some people were reluctant to engage, especially as Jobcentre Plus no longer mandated participants to complete job search activity and there were fewer job opportunities. However, there have been successes with participants becoming self-employed or moving into job sectors experiencing increased demand, e.g. food retail, delivery drivers.
- 14 Significant national and local support packages have been provided to businesses whose activities have been impacted by the pandemic with the council often acting as the conduit for national schemes. Support to local businesses included implementing immediate supplier payments and rent deferrals for our commercial tenants; distributing £100 million of grant payments to around 9,000 businesses and £49 million of business rate reductions to more than 2,200 businesses; providing an extra £5 million for small businesses not liable for business rates; increasing funding for social care providers by 10% and paying £13 million upfront to help with funding and cashflow issues.
- 15 There is a national issue of high street decline with the growth of online shopping which is seeing a programme of store closures by major retailers. This has been going on for some time but has been exacerbated by the impacts of COVID-19

with many non-essential shops being closed during the height of the pandemic. Nationally, the Office for National Statistics reports that internet sales as a percentage of all total retail sales stood at 19% in February 2020, rising from 2.5% in 2006. The latest available figure which as for April 2021 was 29.4% with it being as high as 36.3% around the Christmas period. The visible effects of store closures, empty shops and fewer shoppers was highlighted as an issue for the county by residents in our consultation on the county vision. Our high streets and town centres retain an important place in our society, but they will need to adapt to ensure that they remain as vibrant and attractive social hubs that people want to use.

How well do tourism and cultural events contribute to our local economy?

- 16 The tourism sector continues to be impacted by the pandemic, missing out on the recent Easter season which is one of the most profitable times of the year, along with Christmas.
- 17 Although many attractions and venues have been closed due to lockdown restrictions, outdoor spaces such as parks and gardens have been open for exercise. Throughout the year we have seen a significant increase in the number of visitors at Hardwick Park and a good level of take up of our online sessions and Love Exploring app which offers activities such as trails and games.
- 18 A refreshed café, library and exhibition offer has been completed at Bishop Auckland Town Hall, and will launch when cultural venues re-open in May. Durham Town Hall will remain closed until the summer to allow conservation and restoration work on the building to be completed.
- 19 Killhope Lead Mining Museum opened on 17 May with a new cultural programme and improved café.
- 20 In preparation for Lumiere 2021, the creative commissioning scheme BRILLIANT was launched in January. The scheme will commission six new pieces of work to feature at the event.
- 21 We plan to reinstate both the Seaham and Bishop Auckland Food Festivals, in August and October respectively.
- 22 Work on the Durham History Centre is expected to start this spring, be complete by autumn 2022 and open to the public in 2023. It is anticipated that the centre will attract in the region of 70,000 visitors each year with its modern search rooms, innovative digital facilities, dedicated spaces for learning, exhibiting and interpreting, and café.

- 23 During quarter four, Durham County Record Office's online programme of talks, family history courses, school workshops and exhibitions was extended to include children's holiday archive craft activities and a special online talk about the role played by the Durham Light Infantry in the liberation of Belsen Concentration Camp (part of our holocaust memorial programme).

Do our young people have access to good quality education and training?

- 24 The pandemic and school closures meant that Ofsted suspended its school inspection programme during the year. On 4 May they reinstated some inspection including Section 8 monitoring visits to schools graded 'inadequate' or 'requires improvement' at their last two inspections. Following eight of these Section 8 monitoring visits by Ofsted (which were not graded), all schools received the judgement that 'leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action to provide education in the current circumstances. The quality of remote education and support for children and young people returning to school are the focus for further action.
- 25 Educational attainment at Key Stage 4 compares favourably with the North East and our most similar group of local authorities but is lagging behind in comparison with national figures. Examinations were cancelled last year due to the pandemic and replaced by centre assessed grades which pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds fair badly in comparison with their peers.
- 26 Pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds fair less well in terms of their educational attainment than their peers. The gap in educational attainment between disadvantaged pupils as measured by those eligible for free school meals and their peers in terms of the average Attainment 8 score at Key Stage 4 is -14.4 which is higher than the national figure (-13.5) but lower than the North East average (-15.5.)
- 27 Across County Durham, the proportion of young people (aged 16-24) Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) is 5.6%, which equates to 596 young people from a cohort of 10,683. [DurhamWorks](#) continues to offer intensive and individualised support, and to date have helped more than 8,200 young people, 86% of whom progressed to employment, education, training or gained an accredited qualification on leaving.
- 28 Nationally, COVID-19 has increased the number of young people who are NEET. Across the North East, there has been a 16% increase compared to last year, nationally the increase is 5.4%. However, the whereabouts of 2% of the national cohort is not known compared to 0.7% across the North East and County Durham.

- 29 Across County Durham, 5.1% of young people aged 16-17 are undertaking an apprenticeship, significantly higher than the 3.8% national average. However, the overall proportion in apprenticeships has reduced due to COVID-19 with more of those aged 16-17 year continuing in full time education or training as opposed to employment.

- 30 Throughout 2020/21, chrome books and WIFI routers have been provided to support remote learning and facilitate contact between vulnerable children and professionals. Almost 2,000 chrome books and 600 routers have been provided to vulnerable children, in addition to the 5,000 devices allocated to local schools.

MORE AND BETTER JOBS: Do young people have access to a good quality education and training?

Indicator	2019/20 comparators			
	County Durham	North East	Most Similar Group	National
Average Attainment 8 score per pupil at Key Stage 4	48.8	48.4	48.5	53.1
Average Point Score per A-level entry in state funded schools	39.9	38.3	38.7	39.5
Gap between Attainment 8 score for disadvantaged pupils and non-disadvantaged pupils	-14.4	-15.5	-14.5	-13.5
% primary schools judged to be good or outstanding by Ofsted	89	91	88	87
% secondary schools judged to be good or outstanding by Ofsted	64	60	67	76

Our Performance is ■ better ■ similar ■ worse

Long and Independent Lives

- 31 The ambition of Long and Independent Lives is linked to the following key questions:
- (a) Are children, young people and families in receipt of universal services appropriately supported?
 - (b) Are children, young people and families in receipt of early help services appropriately supported?
 - (c) Are our services improving the health of our residents?
 - (d) Are people who need adult social care supported to live safe, healthy and independent lives?

Are children, young people and families in receipt of universal and early help services appropriately supported?

- 32 Having already achieved more than 400,000 successful family outcomes, the national Troubled Families programme (known as '*Stronger Families*' in County Durham) continues to deliver significant and sustained outcomes with families.
- 33 The government has now renamed the programme '*Supporting Families*' and made £165 million available to fund it nationally. The programme will continue to support the most vulnerable families and address complex issues such as anti-social behaviour, crime, school attendance, worklessness, domestic abuse and mental health.
- 34 Across County Durham, we achieved our 2020/21 target of 730 successful family outcomes, including 146 'Continuous Employment' outcomes which was the second highest nationally. Our target for 2021/22 is to turn around 761 families.
- 35 We have completed our 'one year on' review of our 'Locality Early Help Conversations'⁸, a multi-agency group supporting professionals who have worries about families. Feedback from professionals was extremely positive and the new process will continue with recommendations for further improvements the focus of the Prevention and Early Help Partnership for 2021.
- 36 The Royal College of Psychiatrists has published a [report](#) stating that almost 400,000 children sought help for mental health problems during the pandemic. Data from NHS Digital shows that whilst the crisis is affecting people of all ages, it is under-18s who are suffering most.

⁸ Copies can be obtained by emailing performance@durham.gov.uk

- 37 The Royal College of Psychiatrists' analysis found that between April and December 2020:
- more than 80,000 additional children and young people were referred to mental health services - more than 372,000 in total - 28% more than 2019.
 - more than 600,000 additional treatment sessions were given to children and young people - almost 3.6 million in total - 20% more than 2019.
 - more than 18,000 children and young people needed urgent or emergency crisis care - including assessments to section because they or others are at harm - 18% more than 2019.
- 38 Our early help provision, such as the Young Adult Support Café (YASC), continues to operate online alongside existing online support (such as Rollercoaster and Kooth).
- 39 Having focused on promoting the YASC during quarter four, enquiries from professionals, parents and carers have significantly increased. However, this has not impacted on the number of young people accessing YASC provision.
- 40 Although young people not previously engaged in the face-to-face YASC offer are struggling to access the emotional well-being peer support being delivered virtually, we are continuing to meet young people one to one either virtually or socially distanced to support them to access the project.
- 41 Young people accessing YASC have been working with Investing in Children and Rollercoaster Family Support to engage in the United Voice agenda which supports discussions in relation to service development of both the Prevention Admissions work and the Tees, Esk and Wear Valley NHS Foundation Trust 16-25 service. There are clear links between United Voice and the Durham Youth Council to ensure a joint approach to young people engaging in discussions that inform the mental health agenda.
- 42 In the lead up to Time To Talk Day, Self-Harm Awareness Day and Eating Disorders Week young people created a series of social media campaigns to raise awareness, provide links to local support services and challenge stigma associated with mental health. These campaigns were shared via Investing in Children and Stamp It Out social media as well and circulated through local networks including the Emotional Well-being Locality Forums.
- 43 Young people have expressed how challenging they have found the national lockdown - feeling socially isolated with limited face to face interaction with peers which includes most young people being unable to access their education setting. In the last quarter, three young people who access YASC were admitted to hospital due to mental ill health (all admitted to Adults Services).

- 44 Investing in Children are currently agreeing a venue for the East YASC project which was launched on 19 May for the first face-to-face YASC session since March 2020.
- 45 Young people continue to support planning of future campaigns. The year's significant campaign was Mental Health Awareness Week (10-16 May) with a theme of 'Nature'.
- 46 Young people from YASC continue to link in with United Voice and are supporting work relating to the Neurodevelopmental Pathway, understanding the mental health commissioning process, and discussions relating to Self-Harm and Eating Disorders Paediatric Admissions.
- 47 Pupils eligible for free school meals shows a strong correlation with income deprivation and poverty and is therefore used as a measure of child poverty in the county. 29.4% of pupils have been eligible for free school meals over the last six years which amounts to over 21,000 children and young people. This proportion is in line with the North East average of 29% but higher than the national rate (22.8%.)
- 48 National lockdown has resulted in delays to all services contributing to Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). However, the Department for Education counting rules make allowances for significant disruption to the assessment process, and the definition regarding timeliness in relation to the 20 weeks has also changed. Given the disruption to schools, the allowance relating to schools closed for four weeks or more during the advice gathering stage has been considered for all EHCP assessments. Therefore, provisional compliance to the 20-week target for the year so far is 50%.

Are our services improving the health of our residents?

- 49 Since January 2021, County Hall has been used as a COVID vaccination centre. This has enabled our frontline health and social care workers to be vaccinated rapidly alongside those working for partner organisations. The wider vaccination programme has also made significant progress, with over 68% of all those eligible aged 16+ in County Durham having received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. According to [Durham Insight](#), over 98% of those aged 55+ had received a first dose, while almost 89% of care home residents had received a second dose vaccine.
- 50 Public Health has also supported the roll-out of the coronavirus asymptomatic testing programme across County Durham, using lateral flow devices (LFDs). This began with regular testing for our frontline staff, with results provided within an hour. During quarter four, the programme was widened to include business employees, school children, staff and parents and it has recently been expanded

further to the whole community. County Hall continues to be used as a testing site for both LFDs and the lab-processed PCR tests and everyone is encouraged to participate in the testing programme.

- 51 The estimated smoking prevalence in County Durham is 17% ($\pm 2.5\%$) which is comparable with the North East region but is higher than the England average of 13.9% ($\pm 0.4\%$.) The smoking prevalence among residents in County Durham has reduced significantly over recent years but is still somewhat short of the ambitious target of 5% by 2025.
- 52 Plans are also underway for Smokefree County Durham staff to become embedded within hospital settings in the coming months and this is expected to result in an increase in the number of smokers referred from secondary care.
- 53 The service continues to support many smokers with complex physical and mental health conditions, many of which have been negatively impacted by the pandemic. An updated service improvement plan and an 'easing of lockdown' plan have been finalised in quarter four. These focus on workstreams to ensure that the high-quality service delivery is both maintained and further developed, as the service returns to face-to-face delivery.
- 54 Public Health and the Stop Smoking Service worked to promote the benefits of stopping smoking on national No Smoking Day (10 March). This outlined new research confirming that ex-smokers feel happier and more positive than when they were still smoking, alongside the additional risks that COVID-19 places on those who smoke.
- 55 Provisional data provided by County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust (CDDFT) show that 14.1% of women were smoking at the time of delivery (SATOD) in quarter four. This is below the target (14.7%) and is considerably lower than achieved in quarter three (16.9%)⁹.
- 56 Despite reductions over time, SATOD remains high in County Durham. Following emerging evidence that smoking increases the risks of developing life-threatening complications from COVID-19, alongside the already known risks of smoking during pregnancy we supported the regional campaign #Quit4Covid encouraging women and their significant others' to reduce their risks by quitting smoking.
- 57 In County Durham, we developed bespoke materials for pregnant women who smoke which were distributed across maternity services in the area.

⁹ These data only relate to women who delivered a baby within a County Durham hospital and are subject to change following the publication of the data that captures women who deliver outside of the county.

- 58 The COVID-19 pandemic has adversely affected our ability to drive down SATOD rates, but the work being reinstated at both a regional and local level will help us to more effectively support pregnant women and their significant others to stop smoking including:
- reintroduction of Carbon Monoxide (CO) monitoring and seamless pathways to support
 - digital based support for pregnant women who do not want to engage in services
 - enhanced support for pregnant women through Smokefree County Durham
 - a focus on relapse prevention postpartum
 - wider tobacco control work focusing on smoke free homes and second hand smoke.
- 59 Breastfeeding initiation and prevalence at 6-8 weeks after birth remains significantly lower in County Durham the national average and work continues to raise awareness of the many health benefits to both mother and child from breastfeeding.
- 60 The 0-25 family health service infant feeding team continue to provide advice and support to parents on all infant feeding related issues and concerns. The team have been creative in providing support both during face-to-face contacts (if required), and through online, social media and telephone enquiries. The breastfeeding champions role is being strengthened and they are working alongside their community breastfeeding peer supporter to support families.
- 61 One in four children in County Durham are measured as overweight or obese at Reception Year age rising to one in three at Year 6. The proportion is nearly two in three in adulthood.
- 62 Public Health continues to support the Active 30 campaign including supporting resource development, communications, and equitable support to increase physical activity in schools and communities. By March 2021, 60 schools had pledged to work with the programme and work is ongoing to promote further sign-up across County Durham. Specific messaging has been developed to target schools in areas of most need, based on excess weight and deprivation data to encourage sign up.
- 63 To support the Holiday Activities with Healthy Food programme, a new website has been created to promote physical activity within the community. This aims to ensure that physical activity quality standards are embedded, with a planned timetable of resources to support activities. This supported the development of activity during the 2021 Easter holidays.

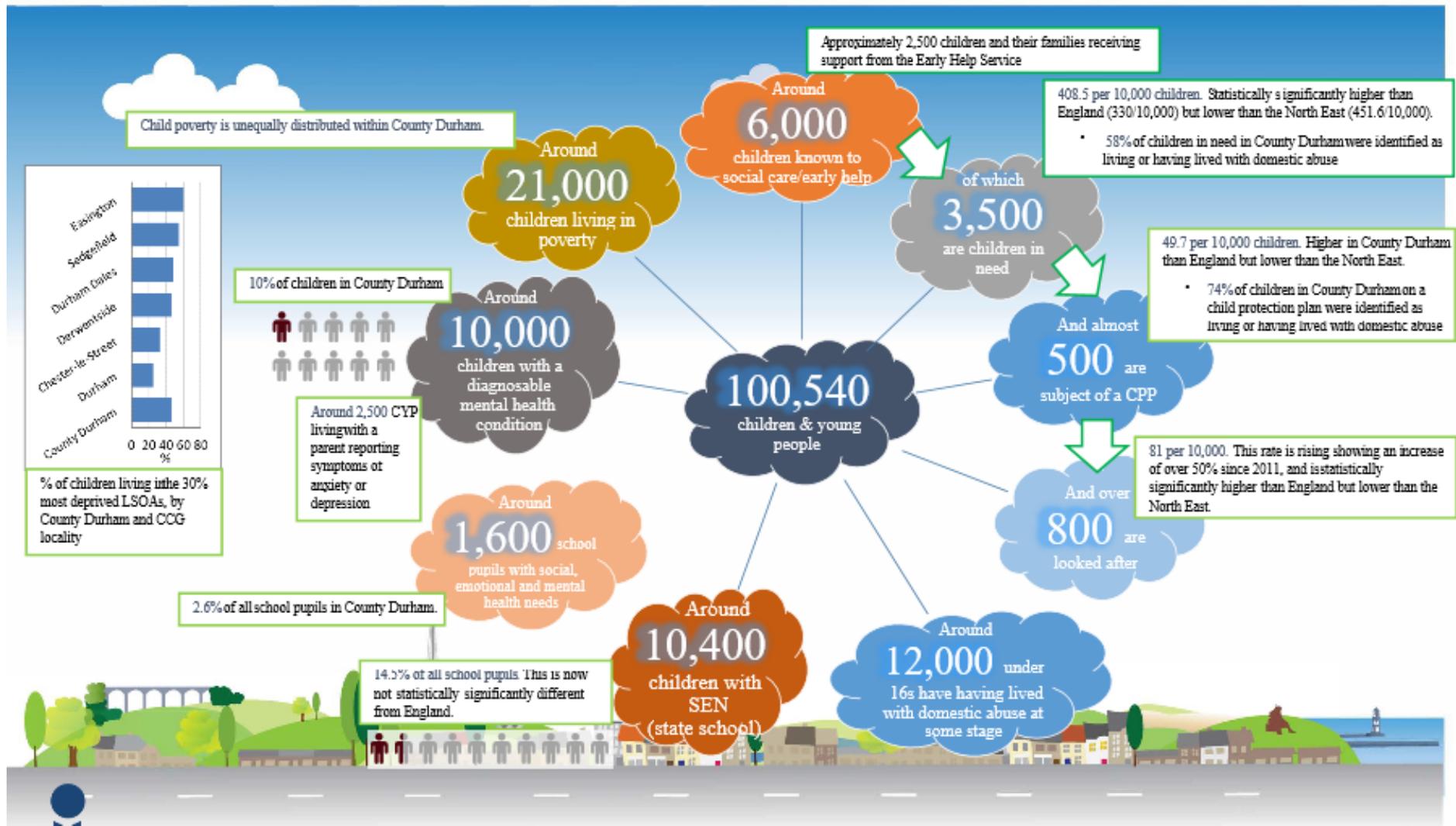
- 64 During quarter four, the new Suicide Prevention Alliance action plan and training resources were shared with the Suicide Prevention Alliance for comments and feedback. This will support the final plan for work for the forthcoming year.
- 65 Public Health is also working with regional partners to consider the development of a self-harm social media project, which will provide resources for clinical staff. The team is also working on a regional recovery plan linked to mental health, with areas of focus including mental well-being for all, workplaces and vulnerable groups and communities. Rates of suspected suicide in County Durham have been lower in quarter four, compared to the same quarter in both 2019 and 2020.
- 66 Research continues to demonstrate the impact of the pandemic on people's mental health. To support council staff, a Well-being Portal has been launched which provides resources, advice, and guidance for staff to support both their own and other colleagues' mental health. Public Health and our Time to Change Champions also promoted 'Time to Talk Day' on 4 February 2021, to highlight the importance of talking with others about mental health. This included the key messages of checking-in, listening and asking questions about how people are feeling.
- 67 In line with the government's Roadmap to Recovery our leisure centre gyms and pools re-opened on 12 April. Additional outdoor fitness classes, including bootcamps have been added to the programme at some leisure centres. The Mywellness app will continue to be free to use while the leisure centres operate a reduced programme. The app includes daily workouts, challenges and on demand and live fitness classes.

Are people who need adult social care supported to live safe, healthy and independent lives?

- 68 At the end of March 2021, our Operational Pressures Escalation Levels (OPEL) tracker showed that most of our older people care homes had no significant issues with either COVID-19 infection, PPE or staffing. We are, however, closely monitoring this and other data as lockdown restrictions start to ease.
- 69 A virtual event for social workers (and the social care professionals who work alongside them) across Adult and Health Services and Children and Young People's Services was held on 16 March 2021 to support World Social Work Day. This provided examples of and updates on the important work that social workers have been delivering, particularly during the pandemic. It also highlighted tips on productivity, well-being, and self-care.
- 70 Permanent admissions to residential and nursing care remain lower than in previous years with admission rates for 2020/21 significantly below the rate for the previous year.

CONNECTED COMMUNITIES SAFER: Are children, young people and families in social work services appropriately supported?

Vulnerability: The scale of the challenge



Connected Communities - Safer

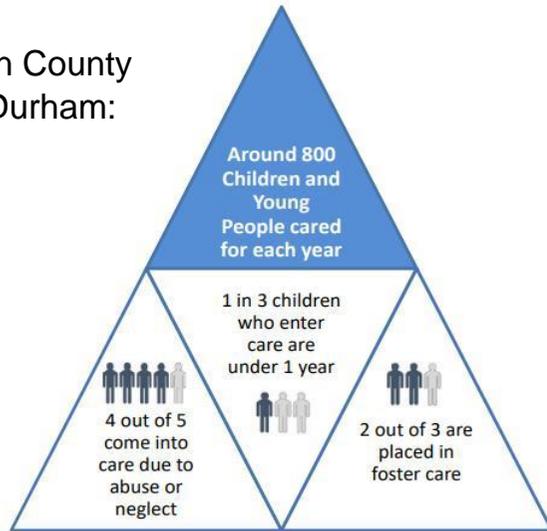
- 71 The ambition of Connected Communities – Safer is linked to the following key questions:
- (a) Are children, young people and families in receipt of social work services appropriately supported and safeguarded?
 - (b) Are we being a good corporate parent for children looked after?
 - (c) How effective are we at tackling crime and disorder?
 - (d) How effective are we at tackling anti-social behaviour?
 - (e) How well do we reduce misuse of drugs and alcohol?
 - (f) How well do we tackle abuse of vulnerable people, including domestic abuse, child exploitation and radicalisation?
 - (g) How do we keep our environment safe, including roads and waterways?

Are children, young people and families in receipt of social work services appropriately supported and safeguarded?

- 72 A recent Public Accounts Committee report [into support for children's education during the COVID-19 pandemic](#) highlighted that referrals to children's social care services were significantly lower than average during the period when schools were closed. This national trend has also been seen in County Durham.
- 73 However, detailed analysis has shown referrals relating to children suspected of or likely to be suffering significant harm has remained static, despite the overall decrease. The analysis also highlighted that we are seeing fewer children with multiple referrals – our re-referral rate, a key area for improvement, has reduced bringing us in line with national benchmarks and is a reflection of improved and sustained outcomes for the children and families we work with.
- 74 The complexity of the referrals to Children's Social Care is increasing and COVID-19 has prevented us closing some cases as we have been unable to complete actions identified in children's plans, for example parental attendance at domestic abuse perpetrator courses as the courses are not running.
- 75 This has impacted on the caseloads of social workers. However, the newly qualified social workers recruited earlier this year will soon be able to hold more cases as they progress which will have a positive impact on caseloads.
- 76 Our social workers continued to maintain face-to-face visits with children and families, particularly for those we are most concerned about. In addition, they have seen most children and young people within five days of a referral decision date, and the timeliness of key areas of work, such as assessments and Initial Child Protection Conferences, have been maintained and in some instances improved.

CONNECTED COMMUNITIES SAFER: Are we being a good corporate parent to Children Looked After (CLA)?

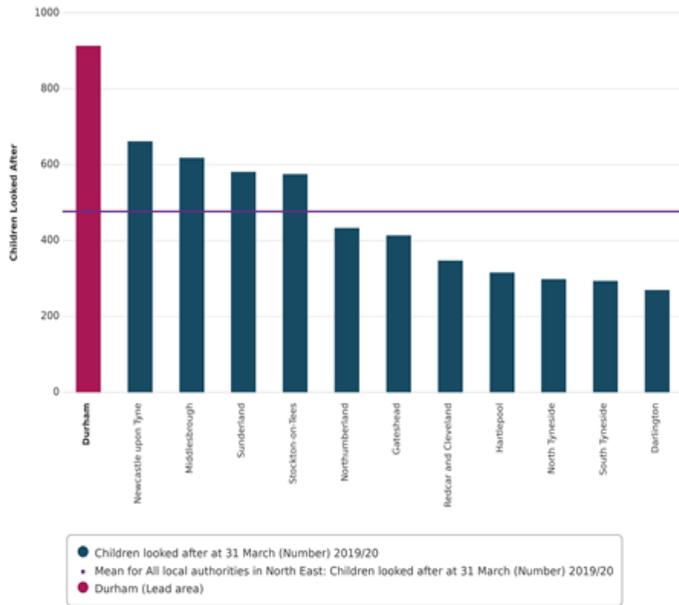
In County Durham:



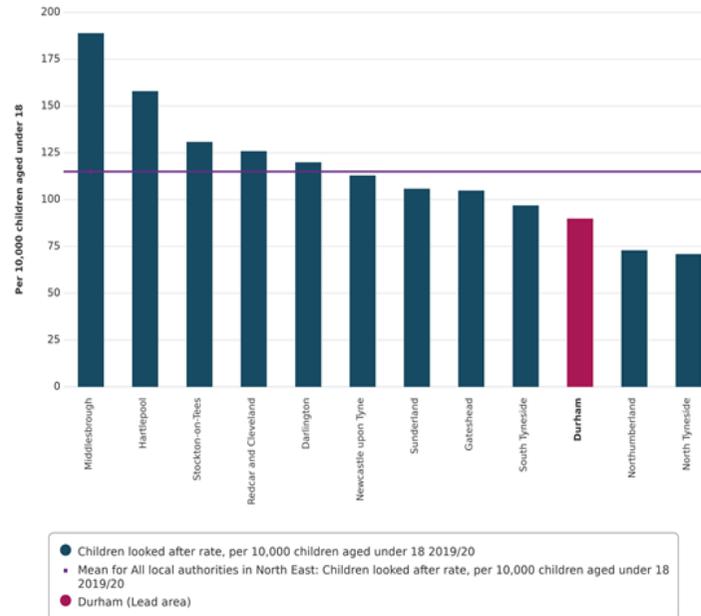
National research indicates:

- 4x** • more likely to have mental health difficulties than their peers
- 44%** • more likely to have other health problems (asthma, allergies, weight loss)
- 66%** • of CLA have an identified special educational need or disability
- 62%** • become looked after following experiences of abuse or neglect
- 60%** • CLA in England have emotional and mental health problems
- 2x** • more likely to have drug and/or alcohol problems
- 25%** • more likely for girls leaving care to become pregnant within a year

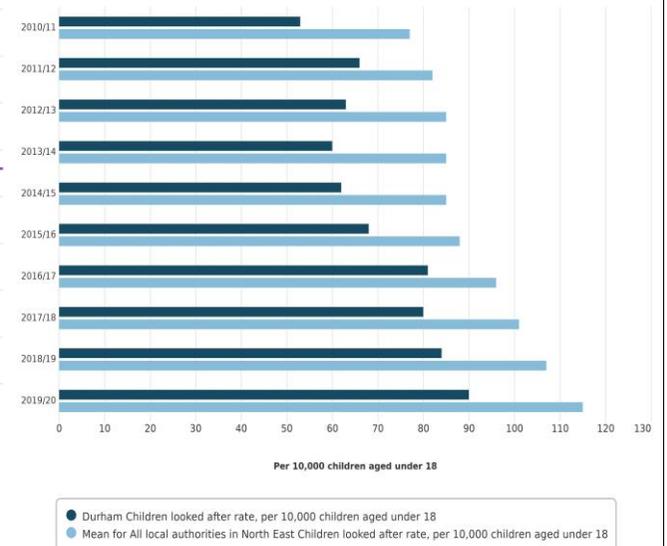
Number of children looked after at 31 March by LA (2019/20) for All local authorities in North East



Children looked after rate, per 10,000 children aged under 18 (2019/20) for All local authorities in North East



Children looked after rate, per 10,000 children aged under 18 (from 2010/11 to 2019/20) for Durham



Source: Department for Education

Are we being a good corporate parent to Children Looked After (CLA)?

- 77 There is strong evidence that children in care are at a higher risk of poor health, education and social outcomes than their peers and that these disadvantages persist into adulthood.
- 78 An increase in the number of children looked after during COVID-19 has been experienced during the pandemic and this was predominantly due to the closure of/delays in court proceedings, rather than an increase in children starting to be looked after. This trend started to reverse during quarter four as the courts re-opened. However, there is a long-term rising trend in CLA across the county which is being closely monitored.
- 79 The higher numbers of CLA is reflected nationally, and has led to placement and budget pressures. Since the first lockdown, our in-house foster care capacity has reduced, primarily due to some foster carers de-registering or taking a break due to the pandemic. New recruitment campaigns are due to begin.
- 80 We are progressing with our Residential Care Transformation Programme, having opened one small children's home this year and planning to reconfigure / develop homes for children and young people with complex needs through to 2023.

How effective are we at tackling crime and disorder, and Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)?

- 81 Throughout 2020/21, there was a 12% decrease in recorded crime compared to 2019/20, equating to more than 6,000 fewer crimes. Although, reductions were across all crime categories, the decrease was more noticeable across theft-related offences, including vehicle crime, burglaries and shoplifting, which have reduced by a third. The decreases reflect people spending more time at home, being fewer opportunities for theft in public spaces and the closure of non-essential retail/night time economy.
- 82 During the same period, ASB increased by 13% which equated to more than 4,000 additional incidents. The increase in environmental ASB was mostly driven by a 22% increase in reported fly-tips, which mainly occurred between April and June and coincided with the closure of the Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs). The increase in nuisance ASB was a combination of residents spending more time at home, not only witnessing and reporting events but also driving increases in areas such as noise complaints, and the enforcement of COVID-19 restrictions.
- 83 Although 23% of all ASB incidents reported to the police during 2020/21 were flagged as COVID related, it is important to remember some of these incidents,

e.g. those relating to parties, might have been reported even if COVID restrictions were not in place.

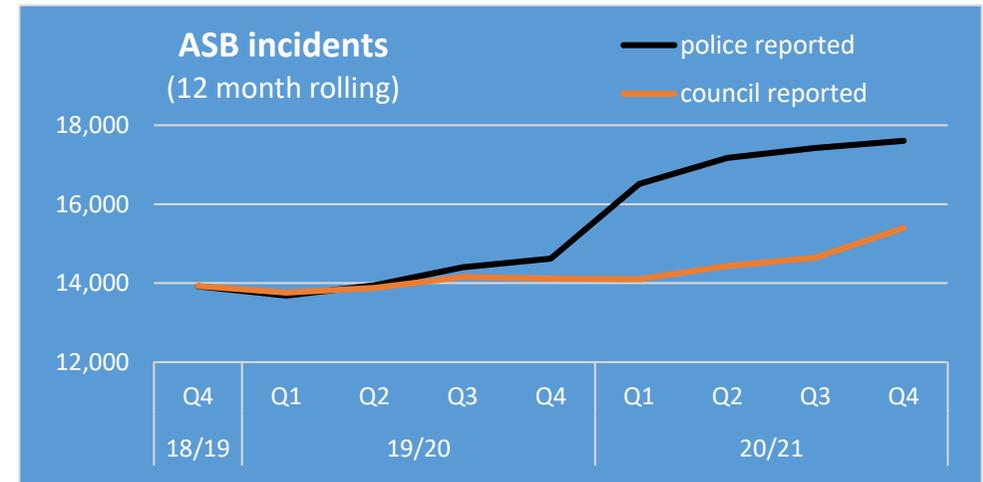
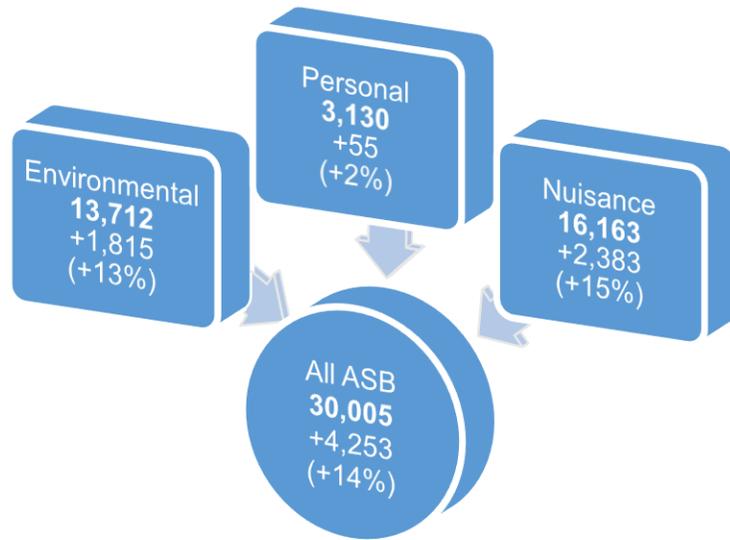
- 84 During 2020/21, deliberate fires relating to road vehicles and rubbish increased slightly. The latter coincided with a period in which increased levels of household waste were generated, HWRCs were closed and other COVID restrictions were in place.

How well do we reduce misuse of drugs and alcohol?

- 85 The Drugs Review conducted by Public Health England in 2017 indicated that for every pound spent on drug treatment, there is a £2.50 social return on investment recouped in crime, health and social care costs.
- 86 Alcohol is a contributory factor in many incidents of violent crime including incidents of domestic abuse, sexual violence and child sexual exploitation. It is also a significant factor in child neglect and child protection. Alcohol misuse also causes harm to people's physical and mental health and can impact on families of affected individuals and the wider community.
- 87 The council, through its public health role, commissions drug and alcohol recovery services in County Durham which can be accessed through a GO, other health or social care professional or by self-referral. Successful treatment outcomes are monitored by the council and the Safe Durham Partnership which is the statutory community safety partnership for the county. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, drug and alcohol recovery services have been operating with reduced hours and with some clients being supported via remote provision.

CONNECTED COMMUNITIES SAFER: How effective are we at tackling crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour?

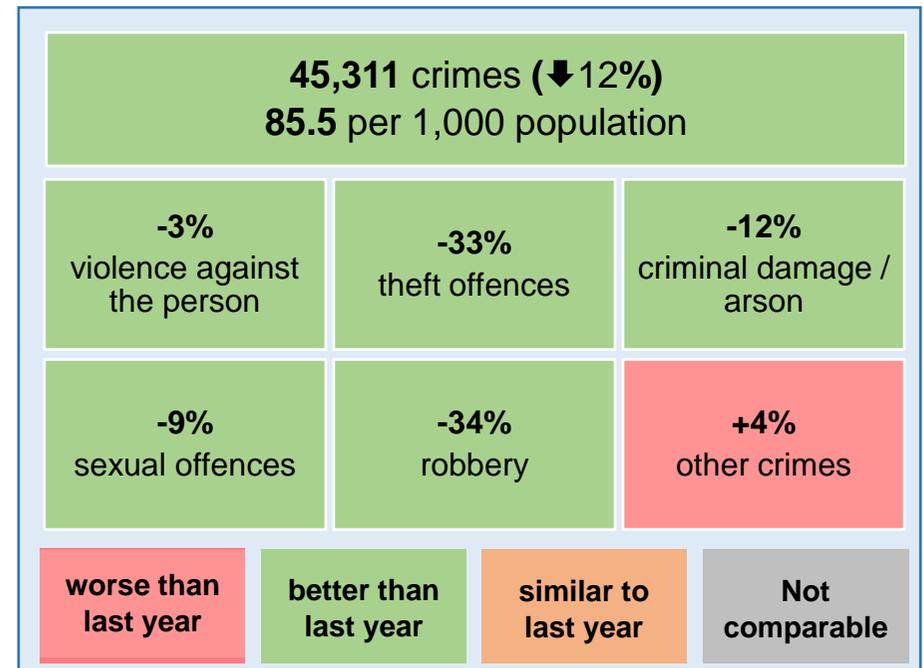
Police and council reported ASB



		2019/20	2020/21	Change	
Deliberate primary fires ¹	all	466	468	2	0%
	relating to road vehicles	283 (61%)	317 (68%)	34	12%
Deliberate secondary fires ²	all	1,763	1,737	-26	-1%
	relating to rubbish	1,030 (58%)	1,052 (61%)	20	2%

¹ more serious fires that harm people or damage property

² generally small outdoors fires



How well do we tackle abuse of vulnerable people, including domestic abuse, child sexual exploitation and radicalisation?

- 88 In line with the national picture, we noted increases in domestic abuse incidents (up 1.4%), 'Violence Against the Person' crimes (VAP) involving domestic abuse (up 5%) and alcohol-related VAP involving domestic abuse (up 12%), In addition, the number of individual victims increased by 6%.
- 89 It is likely the increase is due to increased reporting as people spend more time at home, rather than an increase in prevalence, and is likely a reflection of the intensity of the abuse as victims are no longer able to access their normal coping mechanisms, such as leaving the home, staying with family or friends, attending counselling.
- 90 This situation has increased demand for victim support services. Harbour, our specialist provider, recorded quarter on quarter increases throughout 2020/21 – with an annual increase in adult referrals of 26%. In addition, clients are presenting with more complex issues, especially mental health, so cases are taking longer to resolve.
- 91 On 29 April, the [Domestic Abuse Bill 2021](#) was signed into law. It aims to protect and support victims, transform the justice process, improve performance and promote awareness. It
- provides a legal definition of domestic abuse – for the first time ever - incorporating abuses beyond physical violence, for example, psychological, emotional, coercive or controlling behaviour, and economic abuse
 - offers new protections and support so, for example, abusers can no longer cross-examine victims, and special courtroom measures will be taken to prevent intimidation such as protective screens, evidence via video link
 - gives new police powers of Protection Notices (so victims have immediate protection) and Protection Orders (so perpetrators take steps to change their behaviour, e.g. seeking mental health support or drug/alcohol rehabilitation)
 - extends the controlling or coercive behaviour offence to cover post-separation abuse
 - explicitly recognises children as victims if they see, hear or experience the effects of abuse
 - places a duty on local authorities to support victims in refuges and other safe accommodation
 - automatically priorities eligible homeless victims for homelessness assistance
 - places the guidance supporting the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme ('Clare's law') on a statutory footing.
- 92 Daily multi-agency screening of all domestic abuse incidents continues to be jointly undertaken by children's services, child health and police staff from the

multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH). Sharing information and decision making reduces any delay for children who need to be safeguarded.

How do we keep our environment safe, including roads and waterways?

- 93 There has been significant reductions in all road user casualties since 2009 with the number of casualties falling at a national, regional and local level. The UK has one of the best road safety records in the world but more can always be done to prevent death and serious injury from road traffic accidents.
- 94 Many of the engineering interventions we can make to ensure that roads are safer and to eliminate accident hotspots have been carried out. Much of the work now involves helping to educate and change the attitudes and behaviours of road users, particularly around the fatal four of speeding, drink/drug driving, mobile phones and seat belts/restraints.
- 95 A lot of road safety training and community initiatives, for example, community speed watch have been curtailed due to COVID-19 restrictions.
- 96 Both water safety forums, responsible for managing water safety in the city centre and countywide, met during 2020/21.
- 97 The main focuses for the City Safety Group was addressing the various challenges of student induction week alongside the risks associated with COVID-19.
- 98 Countywide, an extensive open water safety campaign targeted 10 to 16 year olds during periods of warm weather, and featured the five-year anniversary of the death of Cameron Gosling. The campaign was an alternative approach to previous years which involved sessions in school assemblies and other young people's settings.

CONNECTED COMMUNITIES SAFER: How well do we reduce misuse of drugs and alcohol?

	Alcohol specific mortality per 100,000 population 2017-19		
	All	Male	Female
England	10.9	14.9	7.2
County Durham	14.7	19.3	10.4
North East	16.0	21.3	11.0

Our Performance is ■ better ■ similar ■ worse

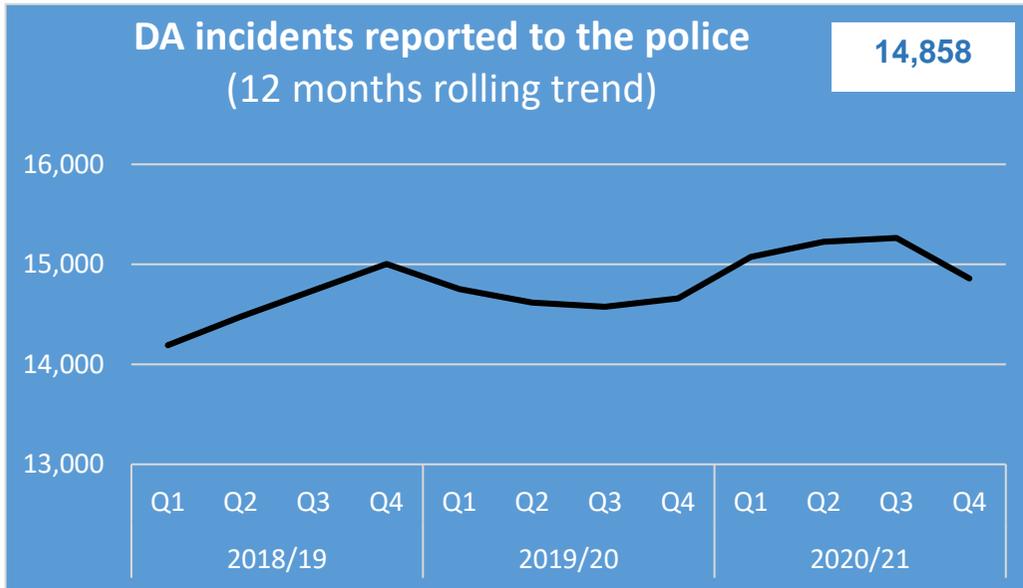
	Deaths from drug misuse per 100,000 population 2017-19		
	All	Male	Female
England	4.7	6.8	2.6
County Durham	7.4	10.4	4.4
North East	9.1	13.4	5.1

Our Performance is ■ better ■ similar ■ worse

Hospital admission episodes for alcohol specific conditions (under 18s) per 100,000 population			
	All	Male	Female
England	30.7	24.9	36.7
County Durham	52.8	38.6	64.4
North East	55.4	47.4	64.1

Our Performance is ■ better ■ similar ■ worse

CONNECTED COMMUNITIES SAFER: How well do we tackle abuse of vulnerable people?



Violence against the person crimes – Domestic Abuse

	2019/20	2020/21	Change
All	8,124	8,526	402 ↑5%
alcohol related	3,434	3,864	430 ↑12%

CONNECTED COMMUNITIES SAFER: How do we keep our environment safe including roads and waterways?

Killed

Seriously injured

Slightly injured

All casualties
2020/21
(2019/20)

15
(19)

149
(203)

464
(659)

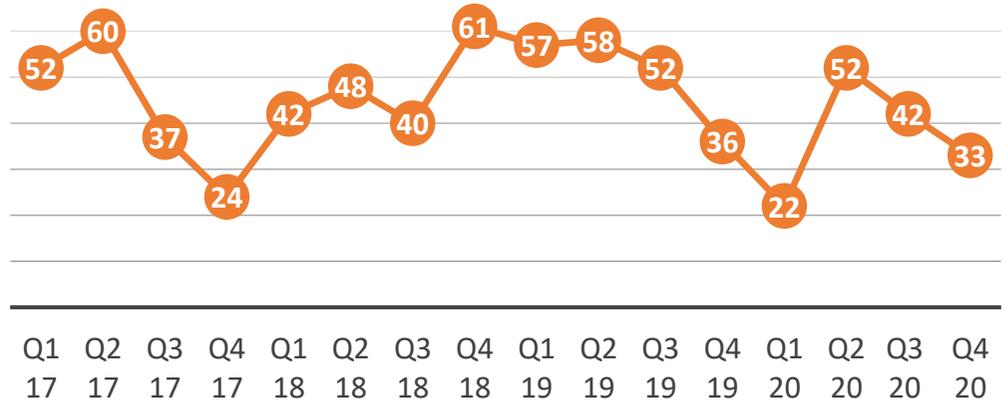
Children
2020/21
(2019/20)

0
(0)

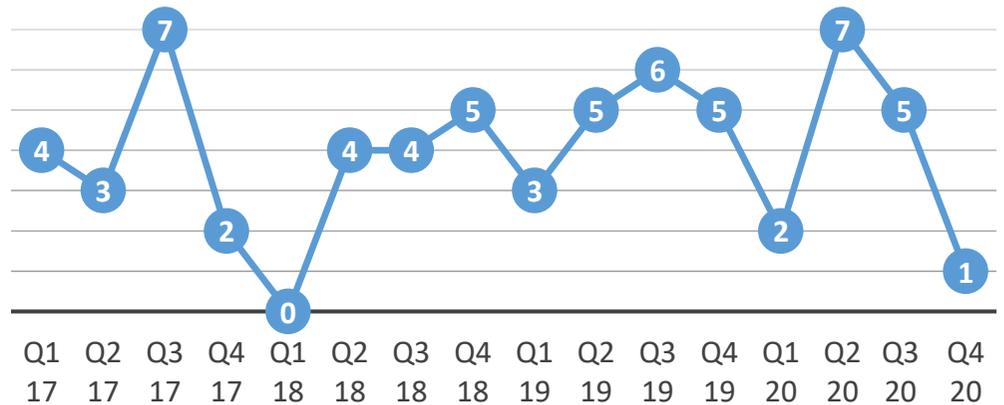
16
(31)

10
(53)

Serious Injuries



Fatalities



Connected Communities - Sustainability

99 The ambition of Connected Communities – Sustainability is linked to the following key questions:

- How clean and tidy is my local environment?
- Are we reducing carbon emissions and adapting to climate change?
- How effective and sustainable is our collection and disposal of waste?
- Do residents have access to decent and affordable housing?
- Is it easy to travel around the county?

How clean and tidy is my local environment?

100 During 2020/21, reported fly-tipping incidents increased by 22%. The increase, which mainly occurred between April and June, coincided with the closure of Household Waste Recycling Centres. However, incidents are now starting to return to pre-COVID levels.

101 Throughout 2020/21, to help deter fly-tipping, our neighbourhood wardens carried out enforcement activity including over 2,000 investigations, deploying CCTV cameras at fly tipping hotspots and issuing duty of care warning letters and fixed penalty notices.

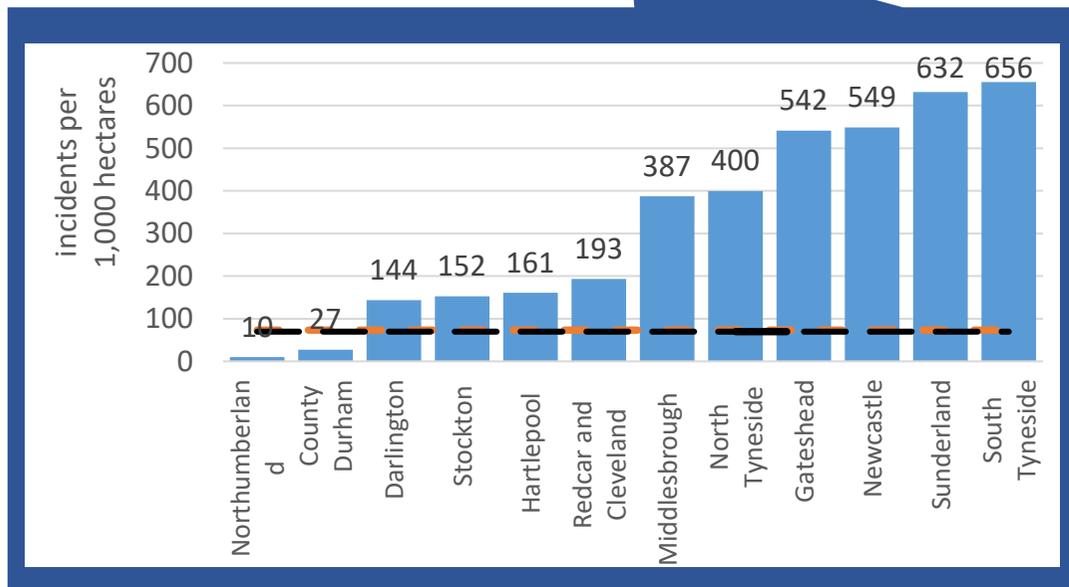
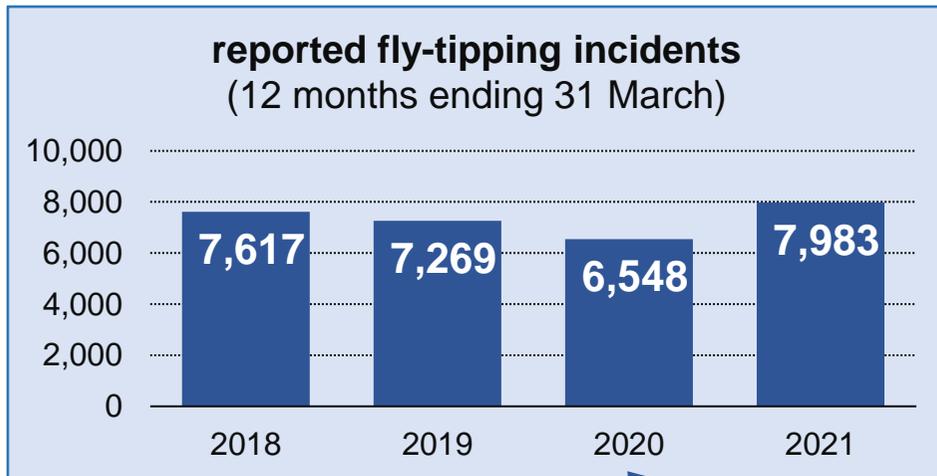
102 Our Community Action Team recently focused on rubbish accumulations, dog fouling and anti-social behaviour in Shildon, working with communities and elected members to identify issues of concern and serving legal notices, where appropriate.

103 Our [2020 Environment Awards](#), 'rewarding great design, environmental guardianship and community spirit in County Durham' were held virtually in February and broadcast on the Council's YouTube site.

CONNECTED COMMUNITIES (SUSTAINABILITY):

How clean and tidy is my local environment?

Summary¹⁰



¹⁰ (data relates to the 12 months ending 31 March 2021, compared to the previous year where applicable)

Are we reducing carbon emissions and adapting to climate change?

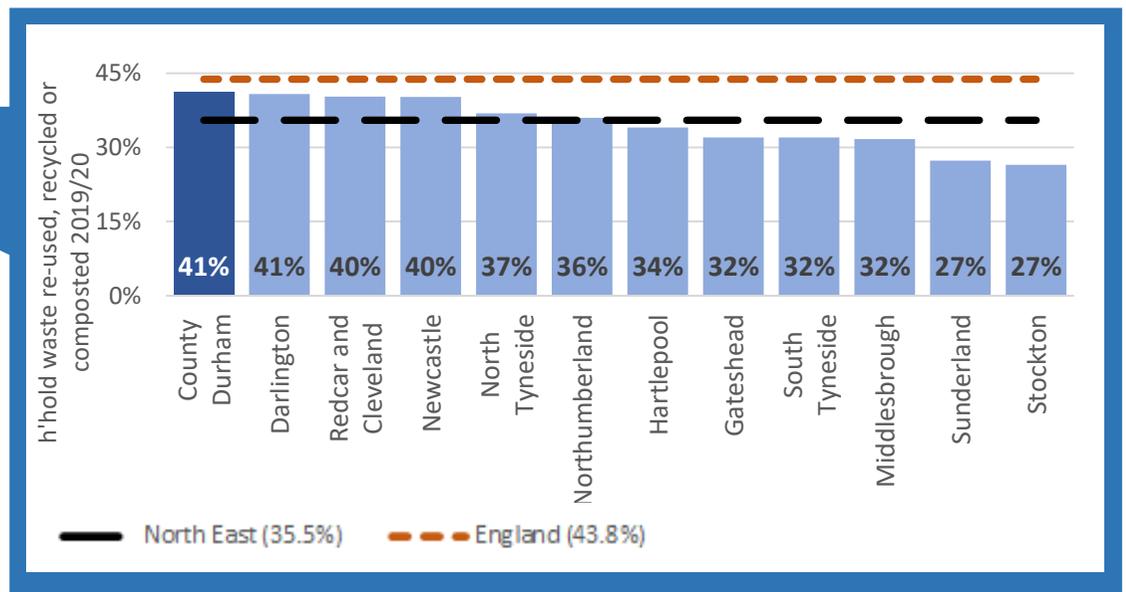
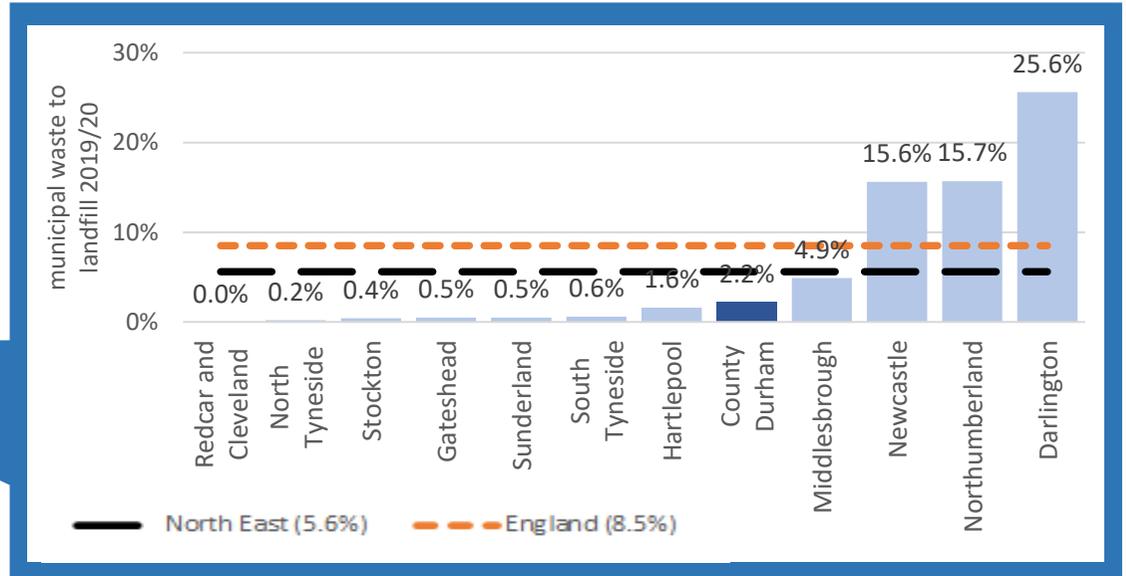
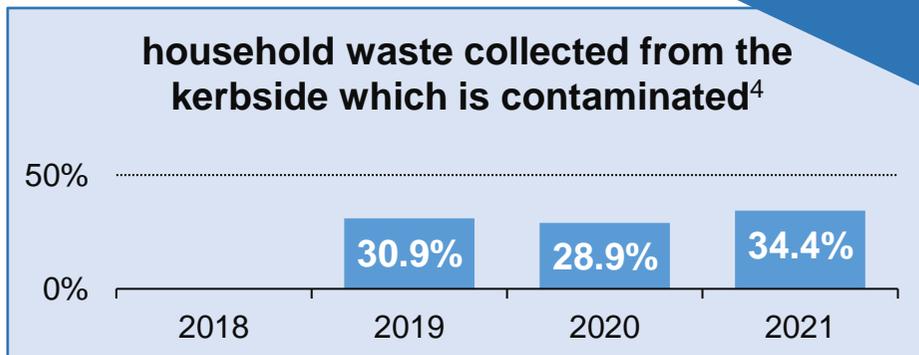
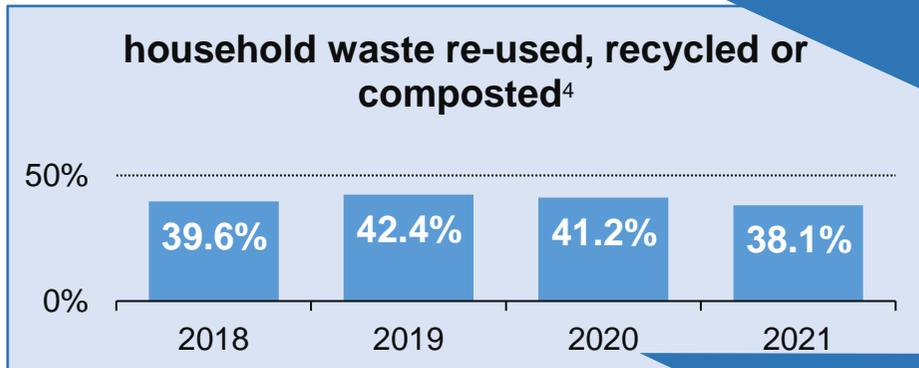
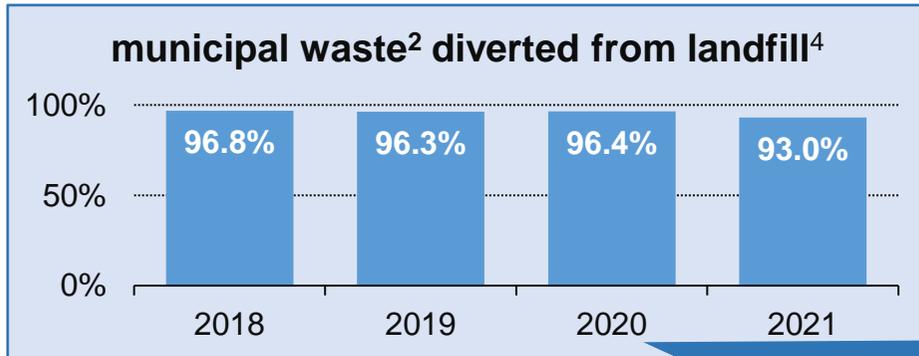
- 104 In 2019/20, we reduced carbon emissions by 51% (from the 2008 baseline) and are now working towards a 70% reduction by 2024/25. Although, carbon emission figures for 2020/21 will not be available until quarter two of 2021/22, we are aware of the significant impact of COVID-19. However, although the council has used 20% less electricity, 14% less gas and experienced a 6% reduction in fleet use, all of which inevitably reduced carbon emissions, most of this was due to building and service closures. As we hope to re-open later in 2021, these reductions are not expected to be sustained in the longer term.
- 105 We are moving forward with a £8.3 million project to create a solar farm at our Morrison Busty depot, in Annfield Plain. The solar farm will power the whole depot, including electric vehicle charge points for our fleet. The project is part of a wider refurbishment to improve energy efficiency including new cladding, windows and doors and LED light installation.
- 106 The flood prevention scheme at Chester-le-Street was completed during quarter four. The scheme, which opened up a 90-metre stretch of the Cong Burn within the town's market place, has not only reduced flooding risk, it has allowed us to create a more attractive public area with new seating and open spaces.

How effective and sustainable is our collection and disposal of waste?

- 107 Throughout the pandemic, due to people spending more time in their homes, we have been collecting increased tonnages of household waste. Although this has resulted in greater tonnages sent for recycling, the proportion of waste recycled has reduced.
- 108 Contamination of kerbside recycling bins remains high but as COVID-19 restrictions ease our Recycling Assistants will re-start targeting areas of low recycling performance. Tonnages of glass sent for recycling continues to surpass the three-year average with latest data showing a 22% increase.
- 109 Although there continues to be an improvement in the HWRC's landfill diversion rate following the re-opening of recyclable markets and increased capacity within the refuse system, the quarter four rate is below the 3-year average of 86%, at 79%.

CONNECTED COMMUNITIES (SUSTAINABILITY): How effective & sustainable is our collection and disposal of waste?

Summary^{11,12,13}



¹¹ municipal waste is all data collected by the authority for disposal. It includes household waste, business waste, street cleaning and rubble

¹² Waste data is reported a quarter in arrears

¹³ data relates to the 12 months ending 31 December 2020, compared to the previous year where applicable

- 110 Having completed its first full season, and accepted almost 17,000 tonnes of garden waste, the composting pad at Coxhoe has now achieved accreditation which will allow the waste to be used as a soil improver.

Do residents have access to decent and affordable housing?

- 111 Although COVID-19 restrictions initially reduced the number of net homes completed, build rates are now returned to pre-COVID levels.
- 112 During quarter four, we approved phase one of a new programme to build 500 council houses over five years. This initial phase will deliver 155 homes, mainly family accommodation and bungalows for older people at seven locations across the county, with the first homes being ready around May 2023.
- 113 More households accessed Housing Solutions during quarter four, following a drop at quarter three. Contact, predominately relating to housing advice and private landlord tenancies, was in part driven by the lifting of the eviction ban in January. As landlords are required to give a six-month eviction notice, clients are not classed as 'threatened with homelessness'. However, we are working with clients to provide advice and early intervention through the [Stop B4U Serve scheme](#).
- 114 A combination of the eviction ban and action taken to house all rough sleepers and those at significant risk of rough sleeping has reduced the number of available properties. This in turn has increased both the number of households in temporary accommodation and the length of their stay compared to last year.
- 115 We continue to prioritise individuals/households for any available properties, review every placement to ensure all options are explored and work closely with landlords to facilitate moves to long-term accommodation. We are also continuing to source additional accommodation, for example, a two-year 9-bed complex needs scheme welcomed its first residents in February, and five one-bed flats at Wheatley Hill, reserved for homeless clients for the next 30 years, will be complete by 30 June 2021.
- 116 The number empty properties brought back into use has fallen short of the annual target. This is because COVID-19 restrictions prevented non-essential work being carried out, caused a lag on supplies/ ability to secure contractors, and reduced public confidence to meet with staff and/or invest in properties.
- 117 Uptake of fuel poverty grants has increased. During quarter four, additional publicity targeted households experiencing reduced incomes due to COVID-19.

Is it easy to travel around the county?

- 118 Construction of Durham City's new bus station commenced during quarter four. The £10.3 million project will increase the overall space for passengers in a light and airy setting and improve visibility and safety for buses leaving the station. There will also be increased facilities including parent and child toilets and a changing places toilet, as well as improved seating and space in the passenger waiting area.
- 119 Free parking after 2pm has been introduced in all council car parks to help support the economic recovery from COVID-19. The scheme will be reviewed every three months.
- 120 We have agreed to extend our cycle parking scheme 'ParkThatBike' for a further three years. To date the scheme has provided more than 500 cycle stands at locations such as shops, offices, cafes, pubs, churches and dentist and GP surgeries.

An Excellent Council

- 121 The ambition of an excellent council is structured around the following key questions:
- How well do we look after our people?
 - Are our resources being managed for the best possible outcomes for residents and customers?
 - How good are our services to customers and the public?

How well do we look after our people?

- 122 Following the announcement of the first lockdown on 23 March 2020 where the Prime Minister ordered people to stay at home, we fundamentally changed our ways of working. Many services and council buildings have remained closed in line with government regulations and we have either furloughed employees or redeployed staff to other areas of the organisation.
- 123 For those able to work from home, we provided practical support such as advising how to set up home workstations or access essential equipment such as chairs, desks, and ICT related equipment.
- 124 Those continuing to work, but unable to do so from home, were kept safe through the effective use of PPE and robust risk assessments which were continually updated to reflect the changing situation.

- 125 Throughout this period, as a consequence of working from home, both work-related health and safety incidents and days lost to sickness fell. However, although our year-end sickness rate is at its lowest level since 2010/11, mainly driven by a reduction in days lost to musculo-skeletal problems, stress, flus and colds over the last 12 months, we remain concerned about the impact of the pandemic on the mental well-being of our staff. Anxiety, social isolation, home schooling and caring responsibilities, alongside more upsetting and challenging work situations have all taken their toll, and we have noted an increase in sickness associated with anxiety, particularly within our Adult Care service.
- 126 Therefore, in addition to protecting the physical health of employees through a range of initiatives¹⁴, we have also been working to increase emotional resilience and protect the mental health of our teams.
- 127 Throughout 2020/21, our leadership and management teams regularly promoted the support mechanisms available to our staff – some already established¹⁵, others developed in response to COVID-19¹⁶. And although we took the decision, early in the pandemic, to suspend our Performance Development Review (PDR) process due to increased pressures on services and changes to our staffing structures (through furlough, redeployment, shielding, illness and self-isolation), plans are now in place to reinstate the process, starting October 2021. In the meantime, managers have been using existing PDRs as an ongoing support tool, maintaining regular online catch-ups and structured one to one/supervision meetings, reiterating the support mechanisms available and offering flexible working arrangements to any staff who need them.
- 128 We expanded our staff support networks throughout 2020/21 (Black and Asian, those with a disability and LGBT+) and are now looking to connect these to other established networks such as the carers. Agreed work plans include HR policy reviews (particularly new ways of working and return to workspaces), staff training and staff awareness raising initiatives and events.
- 129 Our latest gender pay gap report shows that although the mean and median pay rates for women remain lower than men, the gap is narrower than some other sectors and is positive when compared to regional and national levels¹⁷.
- 130 Despite COVID-19 and the challenges it presented during 2020/21, we continued to engage with our staff and provide them with required training. Initially we moved all training online, and found many positives with this method, but we

¹⁴ e.g. vaccination centres, arranging COVID-19 tests (PCR and Lateral Flow), outbreak management, advice and guidance through Occupational Health, free flu vaccinations and access to specialist COVID-19 services for recovering staff.

¹⁵ e.g. [employee well-being guide](#), [Employee Assistance Programme](#), 'mental health awareness for managers' training

¹⁶ Our wellbeing portal, CMT vlogs, e-learning courses (including building personal resilience; how to be effective, productive and maintain your resilience; managing remote teams; leading and managing dispersed teams; working at home in extraordinary circumstances)

¹⁷ <https://www.durham.gov.uk/genderpaygap>

found some learning and development is more effectively delivered face-to-face. Therefore, we have moved forward with a new blended approach to learning and development and are incorporating within our 2021/22 programme new courses which focus on supporting individual resilience and digital skills.

- 131 Our apprenticeship programme continued to flourish during 2020/21, with 47 new apprentices joining the council and 47 existing employees enrolling on an apprenticeship programme to expand their skills and knowledge.
- 132 We continue to support the government's kickstart scheme for young people (aged 16-24) claiming Universal Credit and have approved 91 job placements across the council. The placements provide opportunities to build confidence, increase skills in the workplace and gain meaningful work experience – thereby increasing their likelihood of going on to find long-term, sustainable work.
- 133 Toward the end of 2020/21, as COVID-19 restrictions began to ease, we started planning a gradual and phased return to our workplaces. We acknowledge that some employees have struggled with home working over the year, whilst others have found the experience beneficial with reduced travel, greater productivity, and an improved work-life balance.
- 134 We therefore intend to permanently change working arrangements, in line with the principles of our transformation programme, by adopting a hybrid model. This location-flexible arrangement will empower our office-based employees to split their working hours between offices and home in the most appropriate manner.

Our resources being managed for the best possible outcomes for residents and customers?

- 135 The arrival of COVID-19 in the UK in March 2020 led to major changes in our service delivery. Within a very tight timeframe, we fundamentally changed our ways of working, made plans to maintain essential services without compromising the safety of our workforce or residents¹⁸, and set up new delivery models to meet the additional needs of residents shielding or self-isolating. This included introducing short term contracts for ex-employees or students, sourcing additional staff to support frontline care services, and maintaining a pool of casual staff.
- 136 We were able to develop digital alternatives to face-to-face contact, for some services impacted by the closure of council buildings, which allowed those services to continue. For example, live streaming council meetings on YouTube, online consultation events, virtual appointments, option to upload and return documents online. However, some services were required to close due to government restrictions, for example leisure centres, cafes, and theatres. Whilst
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we successfully redeployed some workers from these services to support our response to the pandemic, a small number (equating to 2.7% of our total workforce, excluding school staff) were furloughed.

- 137 However, as the bulk of affected sites have now reopened under the government's roadmap to recovery, most furloughed employees now returned to work.
- 138 Throughout the pandemic, we maintained vital support to our most vulnerable residents through the County Durham Together Community Hub. In addition to proactively supporting those who are vulnerable, experiencing hardship, self-isolating, or socially isolated, the hub is now also a single point of contact for triage, response and escalation of all COVID-19 related enquiries (linked to both local and national restrictions).
- 139 We also increased engagement with our communities through our COVID Community Champions who helped reduce the spread of COVID-19 in our communities by sharing the latest information and guidance, and letting us know what our communities are thinking. For example, during December our champions shared information relating to self-isolation and Christmas bubbles, and fed back that the public were confused by local tier rules – which gave us the opportunity to provide further clarification.
- 140 Since the onset of COVID-19, we have also supported residents and local businesses with financial advice and assistance, and have proactively encouraged those struggling financially to engage with us to access potential support mechanisms, such as discounts and exemptions, benefit checks and debt advice.
- 141 We also provided financial support to our most vulnerable residents by increasing the Welfare Assistance Scheme by £1 million, providing £300 council tax relief and deferred council tax payments, extending our Council Tax Reduction scheme into 2021/22, making direct awards of food vouchers to parents and carers of children eligible for free school meals, providing funding to help redistribute surplus food¹⁹, and distributing £1.5 million for the community response to COVID-19 through our Area Action Partnerships.
- 142 In addition, more than 19,000 children and parents/carers²⁰ benefited from our holiday activities with healthy food programme, which although universally accessible is targeted at vulnerable children on free school meals over the five school holiday periods²¹.

¹⁹ The Bread and Butter Thing: hubs at Horden, Bishop Auckland, Ushaw Moor and Crook distribute £35 of groceries for £7.50.

²⁰ From 115 of the 185 projects allocated funding - some project examples and feedback can be seen in the YouTube clip.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xilXRtZs&feature=youtu.be>

²¹ Easter 2020, Summer half-term (May 2020), Summer 2020, Autumn half-term (October 2020), Spring half-term (February 2021)

- 143 Despite the pandemic, we continued to drive service improvements across customer services by standardising, harmonising, and unitising our first point of contact (our integrated customer services initiative).
- 144 Our improved digital offer means almost 200,000 residents now have an online account, and since its launch in June 2020, customers have used webchat more than 5,000 times to access service support and advice across more than 20 web pages.
- 145 As agents can support two concurrent chats and chat times are lower than alternative channels, the conversion of telephony contact to web chat is driving significant capacity creation which will support reallocation of resource to other priority services. 95% of customers are satisfied with this contact method.
- 146 We are aware some people are reluctant to use our online services, but our recent survey about digital skills showed most respondents²² to be digitally enabled. However, this could be a consequence of COVID-19 restrictions reducing our ability to engage with our non-digital target audience.
- 147 We have extremely limited data for calls received outside our Automated Call Distribution (ACD) system²³. By migrating telephone lines to the ACD systems, we can view demand and performance statistics, and thereby identify opportunities to improve the customer experience.
- 148 Therefore, when viewing our telephone statistics, it is important to remember that they only include data from our ACD system. As we migrate lines from non-ACD sources, not only does the overall call volume increase, but as there is no back data associated with the transferred lines, any comparisons with previous time periods can be misleading as it appears as if telephone calls to the council are increasing.
- 149 Although latest data shows overall contact by telephone has increased, detailed analysis carried out during the quarter shows there has been a reduction in telephone contact – but it has been masked by the additional call volume from lines transferred to the ACD system over the last 18 months. We estimate that overall call volume is around 20% lower than we would have expected.
- 150 However, some reductions in call volume are due to digital advancements. More customers are using our virtual Interactive Voice Recognition (IVR) system to self-serve so our general enquiries team is handling fewer calls.

²² Of the 647 respondents – 455 were online (71%), 131 were by telephone (20%) and 61 were via paper (9%)

²³ Broadly speaking, we receive telephone calls either through our Automatic Call Distribution (ACD) system, which routes calls to groups of agents in line with 'first-in-first-answered' criteria, or directly to a telephone extension (non-ACD).

How good are our services to customers and the public?

- 151 We use information provided by our customers (in relation to satisfaction and general experience) to improve customer experience and further develop our services. However, as much of this information is extracted from our Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, and in most cases relates to our Customer Services Team, we are working with teams across the authority to expand the report to better reflect the entire council.
- 152 Over the last 12 months, we have received more than 13,000 responses, across 111 different service requests, to our automated customer satisfaction surveys at CRM closure. However, we acknowledge this is a relatively small proportion of overall service delivery, and are continuing to explore options to increase the response rate (including improved capture of e-mail addresses and exploration of other contact channels) and thereby expand the range of customer feedback and insight received.
- 153 There is variation in number of responses and satisfaction levels across service areas, with four service areas accounting for more than half of all the responses received. We believe this is partly due to the emotiveness of the issue, with more emotive requests encouraging greater participation.

	Found it easy to contact the right service	Were informed how long it would take to resolve task	were informed of progress	were satisfied with service delivery
Missed Collection (4,327)	95%	83%	58%	76%
Fly-tipping (1,015)	98%	73%	83%	86%
Council tax account (863)	96%	77%	92%	96%
Street lighting (790)	96%	83%	77%	86%

- 154 The main reason for dissatisfaction with service delivery continues to be not resolving the issue long-term.
- 155 In line with previous reports, most of the 1,300 compliments received related to satisfaction with service provision - 50 were thanking us for maintaining service

- provision (mainly bin collections and gritting) throughout the period of wintery weather. Others related to the actions of specific individuals.
- 156 The main reason for dissatisfaction with service delivery continues to be not resolving the issue long-term.
- 157 In line with previous reports, most of the 1,300 compliments received related to satisfaction with service provision - 50 were thanking us for maintaining service provision (mainly bin collections and gritting) throughout the period of wintery weather. Others related to the actions of specific individuals.
- 158 Of the 2,534 complaints received, two thirds related to our waste collection service, predominantly missed collections and correspondence issues surrounding contaminated bins. However, it should be noted that this highly visible frontline service completes more than 13 million waste collections annually, and issues almost 14,000 contamination letters.
- 159 To help reduce this type of avoidable customer contact, we are continuing to send text messages to households (where we are able) when crews are unable to collect a bin due to, for example, access issues, informing them of the situation and what we will do to resolve it. Crews are also checking addresses before logging contamination.
- 160 We are also liaising more frequently with service areas to reduce the percentage of upheld complaints – we recognise some areas remain high and are carrying out targeted work in those areas.
- 161 National Customer Services Week (5-9 October) gave us a week-long opportunity to raise awareness of customer service and the vital role it plays. A summary of highlights from the week is available [here](#)²⁴.

²⁴ Also available by emailing performance@durham.gov.uk

AN EXCELLENT COUNCIL: Are our resources being managed for the best possible outcomes for residents & customers?

Summary^{25,26}

Digital Channels

24% of contact, up 9%

	do it online	web chat**	e-mail	social media
contacts	280,526	5,127	58,235	6,502
% of total	19%	0.5%	4%	0.5%
+/- to last year	+102,864	n/a	+9,362	+3,336

Non-digital Channels

76% of contact, down 9%

	telephone	face-to-face ³⁷
contacts	1,113,926	0
% of total	76%	0%
+/- to last year	-109,218	-116,711

Calls answered		
19/20	20/21	change
94%	96%	+2pp

Digital Skills Survey*

94% use the internet at home

90% said the pandemic has not prevented them using our services

37% would use digital facilities within council buildings to go online. Of these...

43% visiting building anyway

10% have poor internet connection at home

7% have no data left on phone / want to save data

5% have no online facilities at home

respondents felt they would benefit from extra help in relation to ...

data security
9%

printing
7%

scanning
5%

uploading / attaching documents
6%

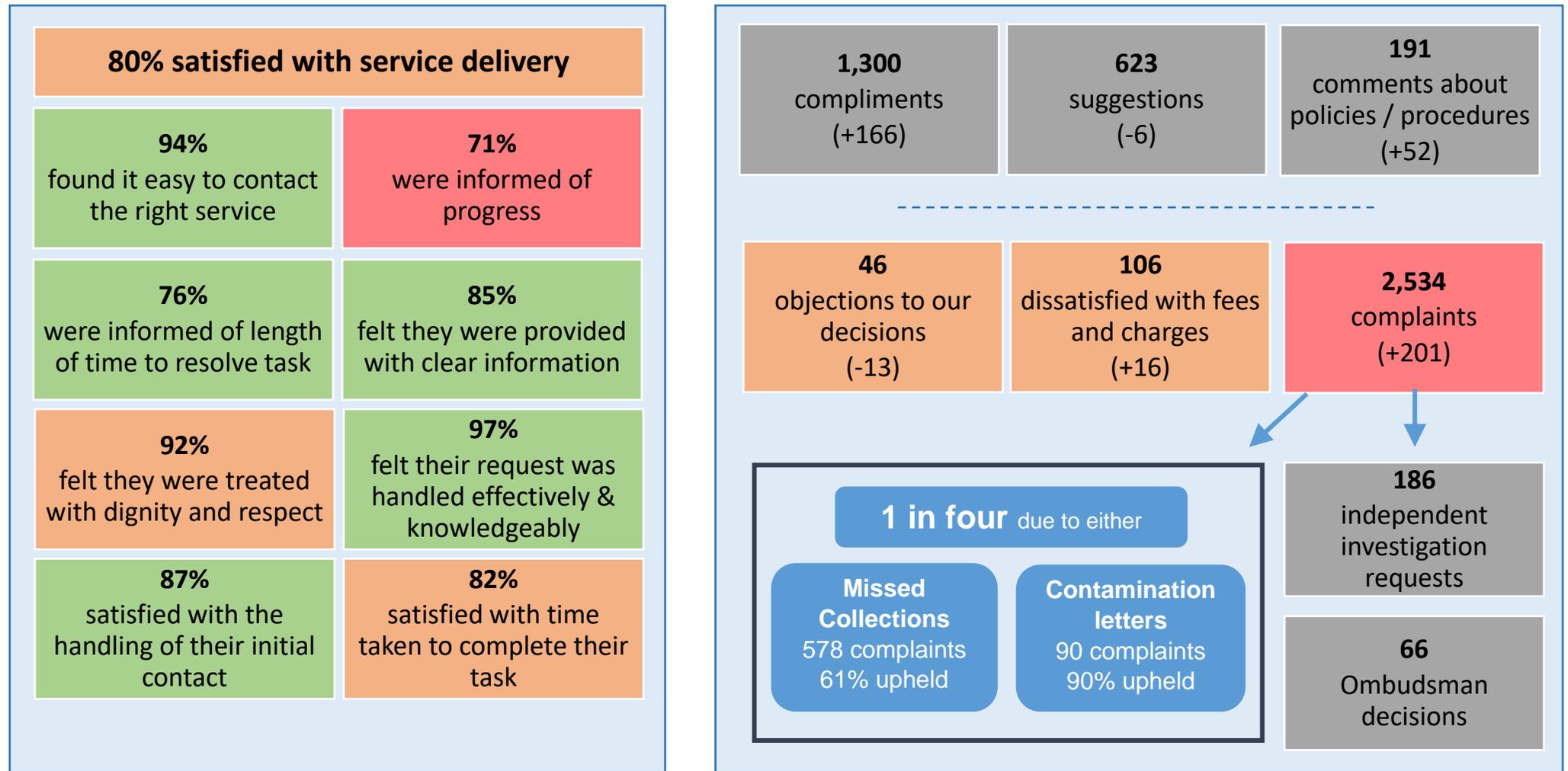
²⁵ data relates to the 12 months ending 31 March 2021, compared to the previous year where applicable

²⁶ face-to-face data is not comparable as Customer Access Points (CAPs) have been closed since March 2020

* 7 December 2020 to 29 January 2021 – 647 respondents

AN EXCELLENT COUNCIL: How good are our services to customers and the public?

Summary^{27,28}



²⁷ (data relates to the 12 months ending 31 March 2021, compared to the previous year where applicable)

²⁸ Satisfaction data is from the CRM closure process (based on 13,260 responses)